

Insights into job attachment, January 2026

Analysis and graphs on insights into job attachments data from the labour force survey

Released 26/02/2026

Source: [Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, January 2026](#)

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'Job attachment' refers to whether someone has a job that they are connected to, regardless of labour force status.

For more information on how the ABS defines someone's labour force status, refer to the following [Glossary \(/methodologies/labour-force-australia-methodology/jan-2026#glossary\)](#).

This article provides updated analysis on job attachments compared to what was observed before the COVID-19 pandemic, following on from previous iterations of this article:

- [Insights into job attachment, January 2023 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-january-2023\)](#)
- [Insights into job attachment, January 2024 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-january-2024\)](#)
- [Insights into job attachment, January 2025 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-january-2025\)](#)

In this article, the pre-COVID average is calculated as the average of each January for the 5 years between 2016 to 2020.

Seasonal adjustment of Labour Force estimates accounts for the shifting reference period at the beginning of January each year. As this analysis has been conducted using Labour Force original series, direct comparisons of January data and pre-COVID averages needs to be assessed with these changing seasonal effects in mind.

Are all people with job attachment employed?

It is possible for someone to have attachment to a job without necessarily being employed. The non-employed job attached population is composed of two groups:

1. The 'long-term away from work', people who have a job that they are away from without pay for more than a month (e.g. people on unpaid parental leave) and,
2. The 'waiting to start work', people who have a job but haven't started (or restarted) in it yet.

These groups of people are included in either the unemployed or not in the labour force classification, according to their current availability to work and when the job could begin.

Prior to the pandemic, there was a relatively small number of people each month who were attached to a job but were not considered to be employed, peaking in January each year.

There is a small amount of overlap in the two groups, so the sub-components do not sum to the totals presented in this article.

For more on how the ABS categorises people outside of employment, see the ABS release on '[Potential workers \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/potential-workers/latest-release\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/potential-workers/latest-release)'.

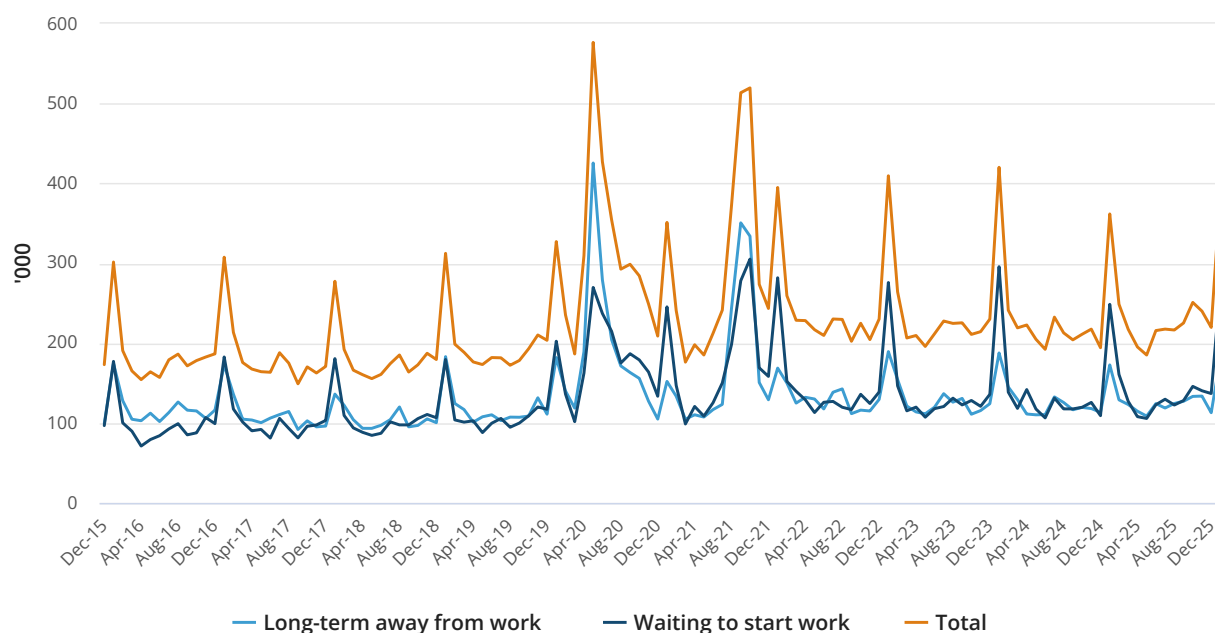
Job attached populations

Chart 1 shows the job attached populations over time. There are clear seasonal peaks in January for both populations, as well as large increases at various points in 2020 and 2021 when lockdown measures were implemented and then lifted.

You can find more information about the impacts of the lockdowns on job attachment, when these insights were particularly valuable, in these articles:

- [Insights into job attachment during the pandemic, October 2021 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-during-pandemic\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/potential-workers/latest-release)
- [Insights into job attachment during the pandemic, November 2021 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-during-pandemic-november-2021\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/potential-workers/latest-release)
- [Insights into job attachment during the pandemic, January 2022 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-during-pandemic-january-2022\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/potential-workers/latest-release)
- [Insights into job attachment during the pandemic, February 2022 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-during-pandemic-february-2022\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/potential-workers/latest-release)

Chart 1: People who were not employed with job attachment, Original

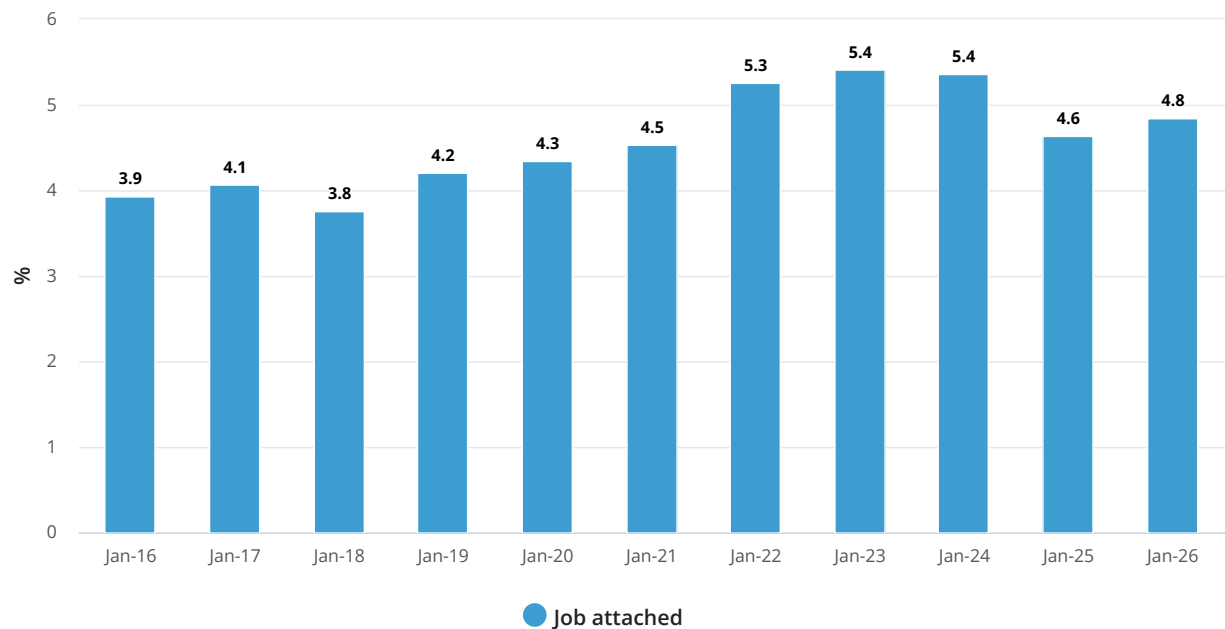


Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.
Because people can belong to both cohorts, the sum of each individual population does not equal the total.

Proportions of job attachment

Chart 2 shows the proportion of people who were not employed (that is, either unemployed or not in the labour force) who had job attachment in January. The January 2026 proportion of 4.8 per cent is less than the 2022-24 January averages of around 5.3 per cent, but has increased over the January 2025 proportion of 4.6 per cent. January 2026 remains above the 2016-2020 average (4.1 per cent).

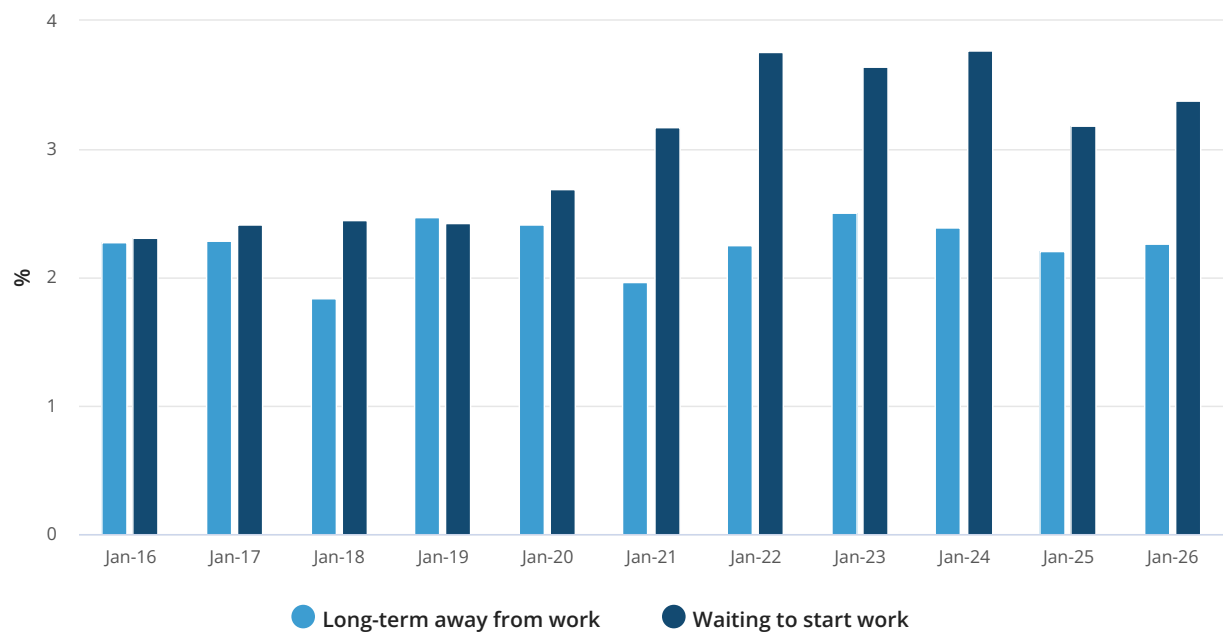
Chart 2: Proportion of not employed with job attachment, Original



Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Chart 3 shows that the increase in the proportion of not employed who had job attachment was primarily driven by an increase in the number of people who were waiting to start work. The proportion of people waiting to start work in January 2026 of 3.4 per cent was higher than the 2016-2020 average of 2.5 per cent and 0.2 percentage points higher than January 2025. The proportion of long-term away from work in January 2026 of 2.3 per cent was equal to the 2016-2020 average, and was slightly higher than January 2025.

Chart 3: Proportion of people not employed by job attachment status, Original



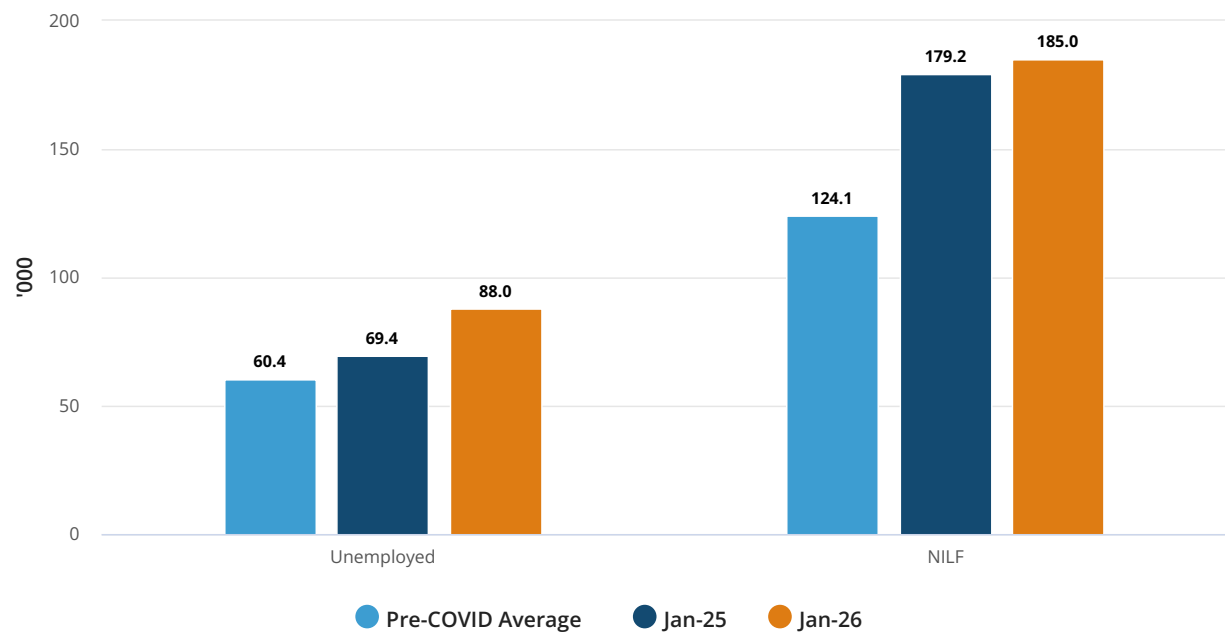
Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Labour force status

Charts 4 and 5 show the changes in each of the populations which comprise the job attached population: people who were waiting to start work and the long-term away from work, by their labour force status.

Chart 4 shows that in January 2026 there were 185,000 people waiting to start work who were not in the labour force, compared to the pre-COVID average of 124,100. Additionally, there were more unemployed people who were waiting to start work (88,000 compared to the pre-COVID average of 60,400).

Chart 4: People who were waiting to start work by labour force status, Original

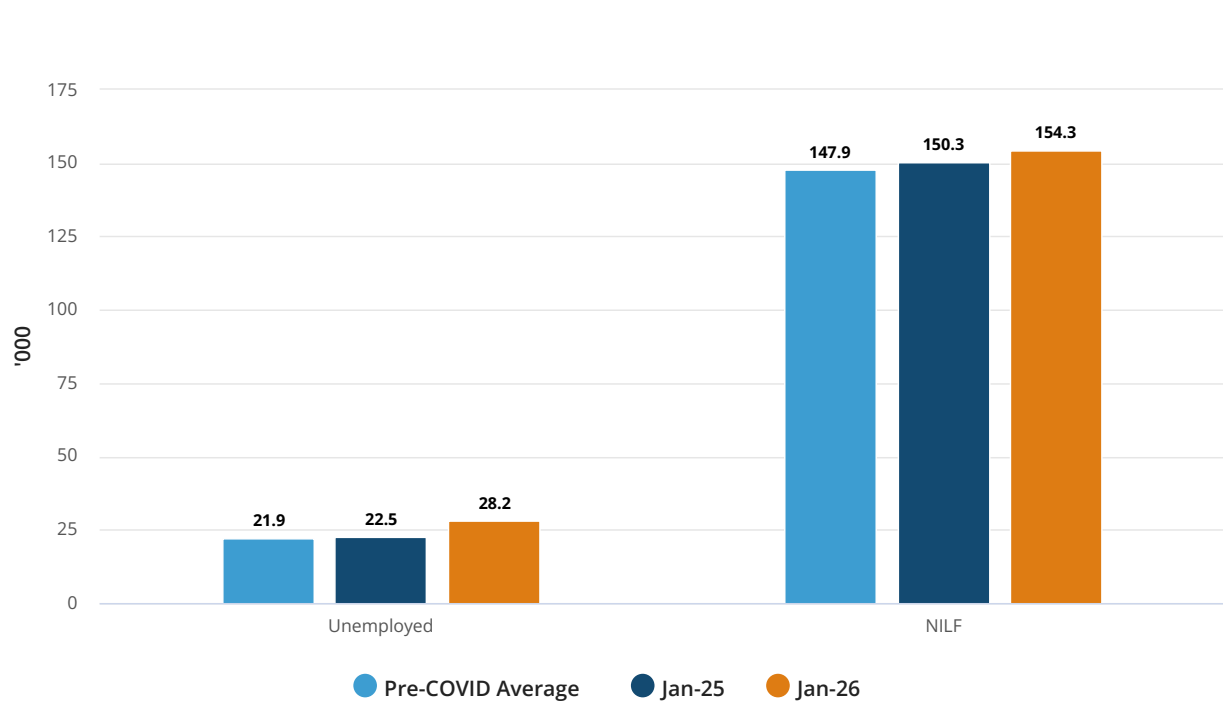


Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Pre-COVID average was calculated as the average of Januaries in 2016-2020.

Chart 5 shows that there were more unemployed who were long-term away from work in January 2026 (28,200 people compared to the pre-COVID average of 21,900 people). There were also more people who were not in the labour force and long-term away from work (154,300 people compared to the pre-COVID average of 147,900).

Chart 5: People who were long-term away from work by labour force status, Original



Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Pre-COVID average was calculated as the average of Januaries in 2016-2020.

As there was not a large difference in the long-term away from work population in January 2026, the remainder of this article will focus on the waiting to start work population.

This article will first explore those people who were not in the labour force, who are the larger of the two population groups.

This article will then explore unemployed people – who are referred to as ‘unemployed future starters’. Movements in future starters data can contribute to future months’ results, however there are other factors that also drive changes in the labour market.

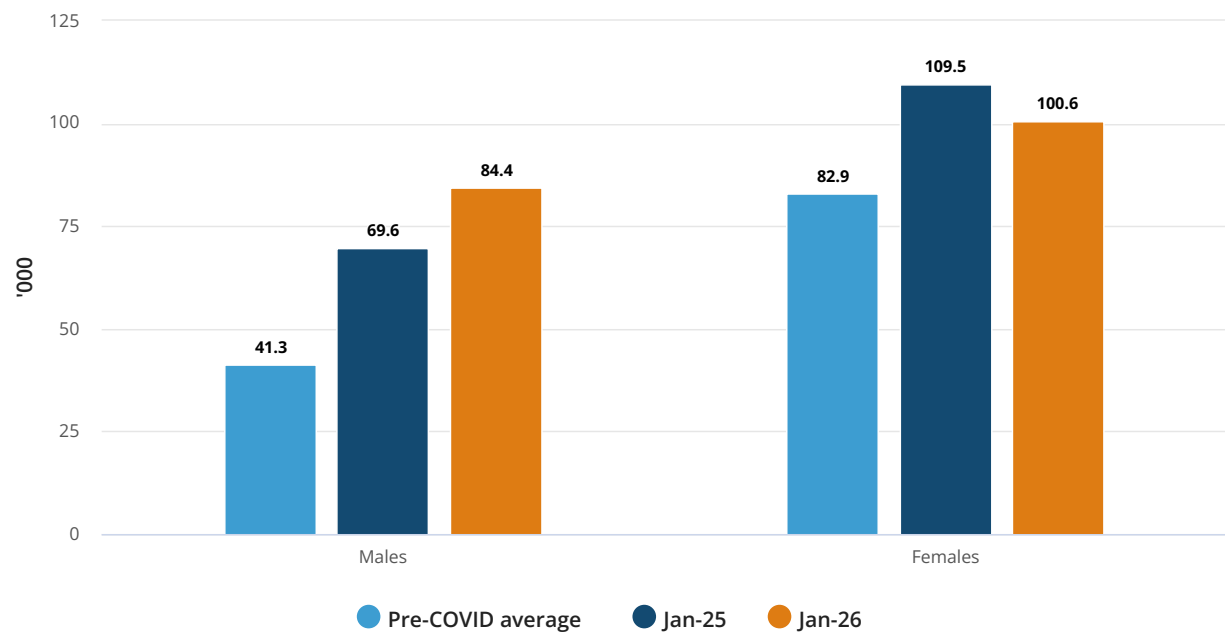
People waiting to start work who were not in the labour force

Sex

In January 2026, there were elevated levels in the number of people who were not in the labour force (those neither employed or unemployed) and waiting to start work, for both sexes compared to the pre-COVID average.

Chart 6 shows there were around 105 per cent more males (84,400 compared to the pre-COVID average of 41,300) and around 21 per cent more females (100,600 compared to the pre-COVID average of 82,900). The January 2026 male level was higher than the measured total in January 2025 by 15 per cent. The January 2026 female level was 9 per cent down on January 2025 and is at its lowest level since January 2020.

Chart 6: People who were not in the labour force and waiting to start work by Sex, Original



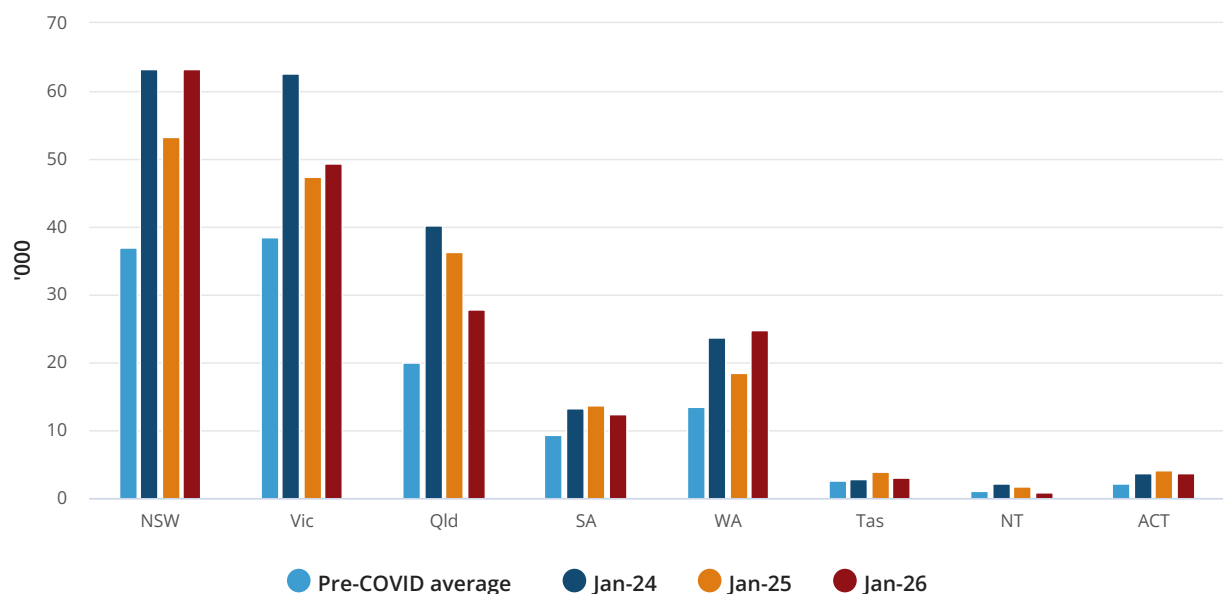
Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Pre-COVID average was calculated as the average of Januaries in 2016-2020.

State and Territory

Chart 7 shows that in January 2026, the levels of people waiting to start work who were not in the labour force were above pre-COVID averages in all states and territories except the Northern Territory. Only New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia were above their January 2025 levels. It is important to note that many of these state and territory level estimates are relatively small and should be used with caution.

Chart 7: People who were not in the labour force and waiting to start work by State and Territory, Original



Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

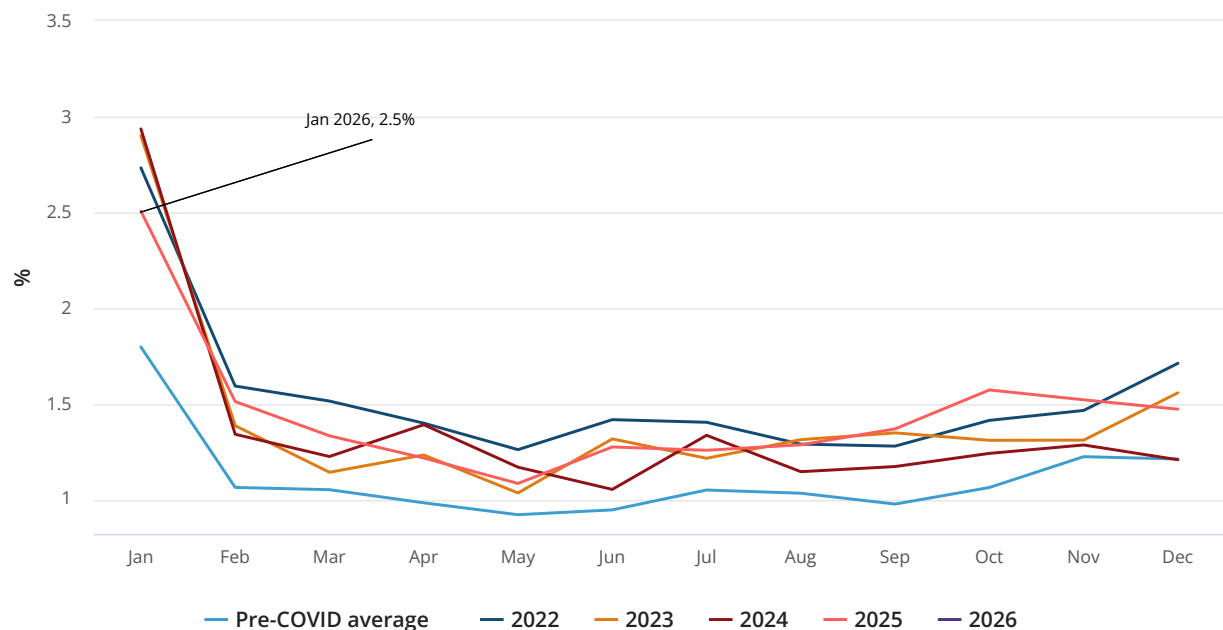
Pre-COVID average was calculated as the average of Januaries in 2016-2020.

Through the year seasonal pattern

Chart 8 shows the proportion of people not in the labour force who were waiting to start work. Throughout 2022-2025, these people made up a consistently larger proportion of those not in the labour force compared to previous years. This was to be expected, given the smaller relative size of the not in the labour force population during a particularly tight labour market, with a high participation rate.

For the second consecutive year, the November to December movement has resembled the pre-COVID movement, remaining fairly level over these periods. This has translated to more subdued January proportions in 2025 and 2026 compared to the January periods in 2022-24, although still elevated over the pre-COVID average.

Chart 8: Proportion of people not in the labour force who were waiting to start work, Original



Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Pre-COVID average was calculated as the monthly average in 2016-2019.

Unemployed future starters

In order to be considered unemployed a person must have not been employed during the reference week, and:

- had actively looked for work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the reference week and were available for work in the reference week; or
- were waiting to start a new job within four weeks from the end of the reference week and could have started in the reference week if the job had been available then.

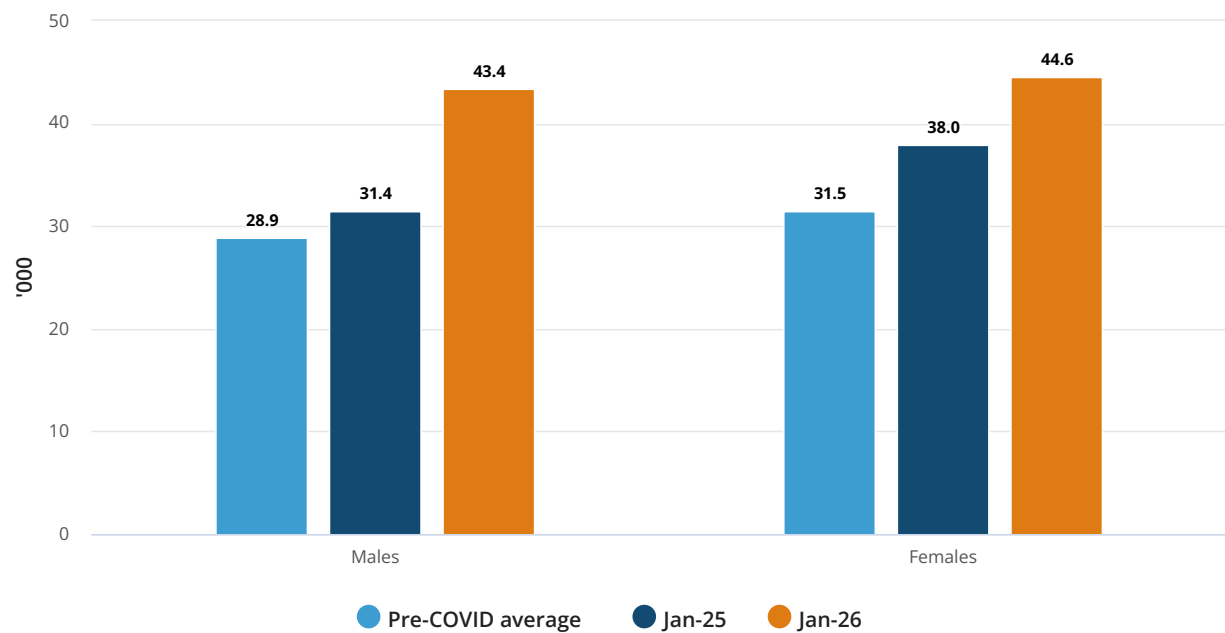
The second of these groups of unemployed people is referred to by labour statisticians around the world as 'unemployed future starters'.

Sex

In January 2026, the number of unemployed future starters remained higher than pre-COVID levels. Chart 9 shows there were around 50 per cent more males (43,400 compared to the pre-COVID average of 28,900), and around 42 per cent more females (44,700 compared to the pre-COVID average of 31,500).

January 2025 marked the lowest levels of unemployed future starters for both sexes in a January period since 2020. In the 12 months to January 2026, males were up 12,000 people (38 per cent), and females were up 6,600 people (17 per cent).

Chart 9: Unemployed future starters by Sex, Original



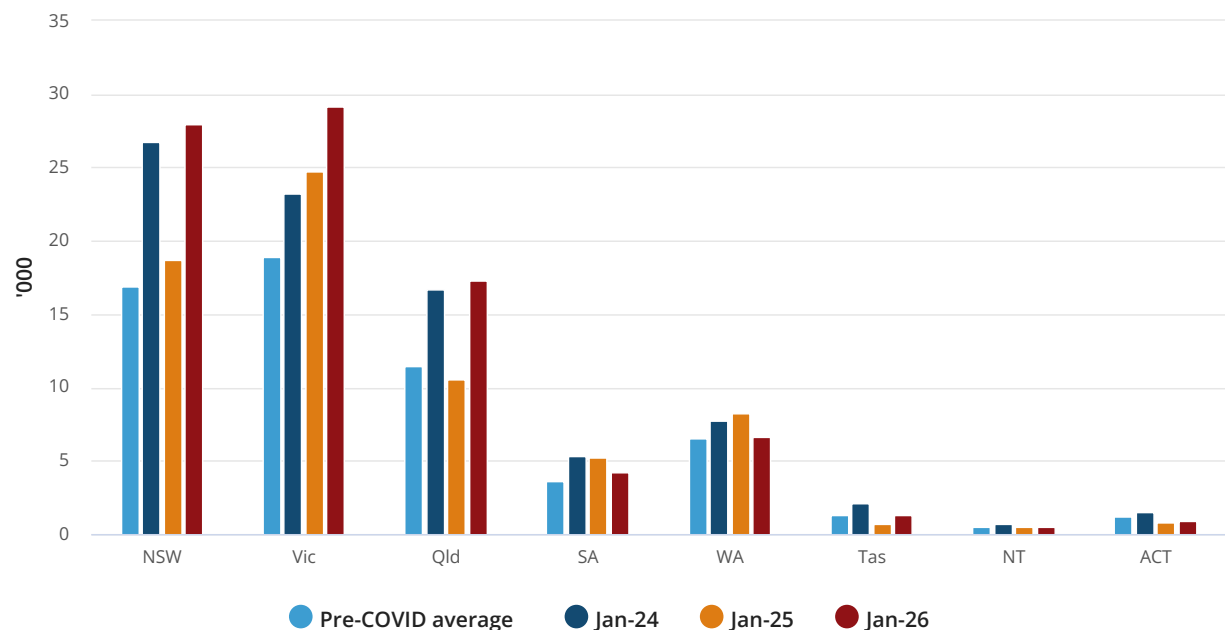
Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Pre-COVID average was calculated as the average of Januaries in 2016-2020.

State and Territory

Chart 10 shows the variability in the number of unemployed future starters across states and territories. Six of the eight states and territories have unemployed future starter levels higher in January 2026 than their pre-COVID averages, with only the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory being recorded lower in January 2026 than their pre-COVID averages. It is important to note that many of these state and territory level estimates are relatively small and should be used with caution.

Chart 10: Unemployed future starters by State and Territory, Original



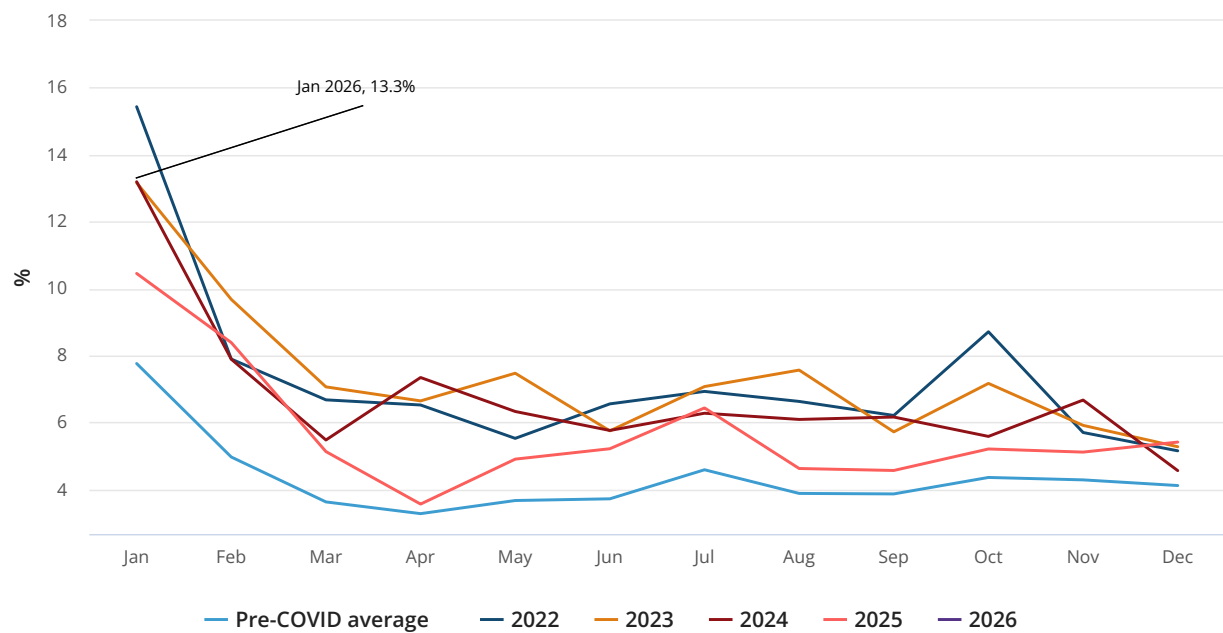
Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.
Pre-COVID average was calculated as the average of Januaries in 2016-2020.

Through the year seasonal pattern

Chart 11 shows the proportion of unemployed who were future starters. For 2022-2025, these future starters accounted for a consistently larger proportion of the unemployed compared to previous years. This was to be expected, given the smaller relative size of the unemployed population during a particularly tight labour market, with a low unemployment rate.

While the 2025 level of unemployed future starters throughout the year was generally lower relative to the preceding three years, a strong December 2025 figure has translated to the highest proportion of future starters for January since 2022.

Chart 11: Proportion of unemployed who were waiting to start work, Original



Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Pre-COVID average was calculated as the monthly average in 2016-2019.

How to contact us with questions or feedback

The ABS always seeks to provide guidance and advice to users to assist in interpreting changes in Labour Force data over time.

If you have a question or have any feedback on additional explanatory notes that would be useful, please contact us at labour.statistics@abs.gov.au (<mailto:labour.statistics@abs.gov.au>).